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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the 1990 census data to describe the immigrant populations in selected locations, and then conducted institutional case studies to learn about the impact of increasing immigration on higher education institutions and to understand how institutions are responding. The 20 case studies involved community colleges, comprehensive universities, and research or doctoral-granting universities in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area, South Florida, Chicago (Illinois), and California. Three key challenges facing institutions in their efforts to serve immigrant students were identified: implementing policies governing admissions, fees, and financial aid for individuals who do not have permanent residency status; obtaining and evaluating foreign transcripts; and conducting outreach and recruitment activities that reach immigrants while continuing to serve native-born students, particularly those from historically under-represented groups. Current administrative structures are inefficient and perpetuate educational inequities, but institutional efforts to promote a more systematic implementation of policy are likely to lead to tension and conflict. Institutional research needs are noted. (Contains 10 references.) (JDD)

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FACTORS AFFECTING ACCESS TO U.S. POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AMONG IMMIGRANTS

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Jean Endo
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FACTORS AFFECTING ACCESS TO U.S. POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AMONG IMMIGRANTS[1]

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INTRODUCTION

Although more than seven million immigrants entered the U.S. in the 1980s and more than ten million are expected to arrive during the 1990s, we know little about the implications of this trend for higher education. This paper presents selected results of a RAND study about the effects of increasing immigration on our country's colleges and universities. The study seeks to identify the challenges and opportunities for higher education created by this rise in numbers of immigrants .

Our study included two primary components. First, we used the 1990 Census to describe the immigrant populations in selected locations. Second, we conducted institutional case-studies to learn about the impact of increasing immigration on higher education institutions and to understand how institutions are responding.

This paper presents preliminary results of the case studies, with an emphasis on access issues. The paper has three sections. The current introduction provides an overview of the study aims and methods. In the next section, we describe how some institutions are facing the problems of recruiting and admitting immigrant students. Last, we discuss the implications of these findings for access to higher education among immigrant students. In so doing, we hope to assist college and university leaders in understanding and responding to increasing immigration in their service areas.

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Some qualifications and definitions are in order at this point. First, our study addresses immigrant access within the context of *undergraduate* education. We do not address the non-credit and vocational/certificate programs within community colleges, nor do we address professional or graduate programs universities.

Second, we note that the world of post-secondary education is extremely heterogeneous. We recognize that immigrants' participation in higher education, the barriers to access they encounter, and institutional responses to increasing immigration vary across institutions, states, and cultures. The challenges that a community college in Florida faces differ from those that a research university in Chicago faces; and the barriers that Caribbean immigrants in New York encounter differ from those that Southeast Asian immigrants in California encounter. Nonetheless, while we have only studied a few of the many places where challenges by immigrant populations are being posed and met, our research reveals a number of general themes that provide the foundation for discussion.

Third, rather than attempt to describe all the factors affecting immigrant students' access to college, this paper focuses on *specific institutional practices* that may influence immigrant students' access. Although this paper emphasizes the challenges associated with increasing immigration, we recognize that this trend also brings opportunities and benefits. Almost every participant in this research recognized the important contributions that immigrant students can make to a diverse, multicultural educational community.

Finally, in this paper we define an "immigrant" as an individual who has moved to the United States with the intention of staying permanently. An immigrant's visa status may range from undocumented to permanent resident or even naturalized citizen. Insofar as possible, our analyses exclude international students, despite the fact that many would like to become permanent residents of the United States, because the policy issues and resources available to them in higher education are distinct.

Review of the literature

Although the experiences of immigrants in higher education have barely been studied, some previous research suggests that immigrants may encounter a variety of barriers to access and/or degree completion. Three related areas of inquiry raise concerns about the response of the postsecondary sector to immigrants.

First, research has revealed educational obstacles for immigrants at the elementary and secondary levels related to language, learning styles, educational background, and family or personal stress related to acculturation (McDonnell and Hill, 1992). These obstacles may generalize to the postsecondary level.

Second, research on acculturation identifies potential risk factors for immigrants in postsecondary education. For example, research on college students suggests that recent immigrants from a variety of cultures (e.g., Mexican, Chinese, Sub-Saharan African) compared to those who immigrated at an earlier age or those who are native born may experience higher levels of stress, lower levels of social and psychological adjustment, and different approaches to schoolwork (Padilla, Alvarez, and Lindholm, 1986; Pruitt, 1978; Scarpaci and Fradd, 1985; Sue and Zane, 1985).

Third, higher education research reveals that many of the demographic factors which increase the risk of attrition characterize recent immigrants (e.g., low income; first in the family to attend college). Further, one might reasonably expect that low levels of acculturation among recent immigrants coupled with "chilly" campus climates for immigrants would interfere with the development of both commitment and integration to higher education, factors that have been associated with retention (Tinto, 1987). In addition, both overt and subtle forms of discrimination can lead to alienation from the campus communities for immigrants (Asian Pacific American Education Advisory Committee, 1990).

Even less is known about how institutions respond to immigrant students. Some observers suggest that higher education institutions respond to immigrants in only limited ways (Romero, 1991). Concerns about the responsiveness of postsecondary institutions to disadvantaged students may

be applicable to immigrants (Aguirre and Martinez, 1993). In addition, research on higher education governance and finance suggests that declining budgets coupled with constraints on the use of such funds hinder institutions in attempting to meet the needs of immigrant students (Benjamin, Carroll, Jacobi, and Shires, 1992).

In summary, there is a dearth of research about immigrants in postsecondary education. Little is known about the factors that influence access and degree completion. Information about institutional responses to immigrants is anecdotal in nature for the most part.

One way to begin to better understand institutional responses to immigrant students is to explore those institutional functions and policies that face special challenges related to the participation of immigrant students. These areas may provide insight into the manner in which institutions facilitate or hinder access for immigrants and may also reveal issues that need to be addressed as immigrants continue to enter our country and seek higher education as the path to economic and social mobility. This paper, therefore, focuses on some of the specific issues and challenges that institutions face in responding to increasing immigration.

CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

In this section, we describe our approach to a series of institutional case studies conducted within four areas of the country that are absorbing large numbers of immigrants: the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area, South Florida, Chicago, and California. The purpose of these case studies was to describe and assess the impact of growing numbers of immigrants upon postsecondary institutions and to describe the manner in which these institutions are responding to rapidly changing populations. Among the questions relevant to access we sought to address through the case studies are:

(1) What policies external to the postsecondary institution and likely to affect immigrant participation are in place?

(2) How do postsecondary administrators and policymakers perceive the roles of their institutions in the changing demographic environment?

(3) What constrains postsecondary institutions in responding to the perceived needs of immigrant students?

(4) To what degree do efforts to serve immigrants compete with efforts to serve other disadvantaged groups, with what consequences?

To select case study sites, we conducted brief telephone surveys of 75 institutions located in the four regions of the country selected for study. The telephone surveys were intended to determine the percentage of immigrants enrolled as undergraduates and major issues if any related to immigrant students that the campus was facing. Following this survey, we invited 16 institutions to participate as case study sites; 14 accepted.

Of the 14 institutions in which full-scale case studies were conducted, five are community colleges, five are comprehensive universities, and four are research or doctoral-granting universities. We also conducted smaller scale case studies at another six institutions, usually to explore a particular issue or program of interest. Of the six institutions where more limited visits were made, four are community colleges, one is a comprehensive university, and one is a research university. Only one institution, included primarily for comparison purposes, is private. Although not all the institutions we visited had accurate data on students' visa or citizenship status, all but three institutions were confident that immigrant students constituted at least 12% of their undergraduate student body. Six institutions reported that immigrant students constituted at least 50% of their undergraduate student body. Three of the institutions we visited were in suburban areas; the remainder were in urban areas.

We spent between two and three days at each institution, talking with eight to 18 different individuals. Our respondents included both high level administrators and direct service providers from the academic and student services areas, as well as faculty and students. Each case study included interviews with respondents from the following departments: (a) admissions

and outreach; (b) financial aid; (c) student activities; (de academic, psychological, or career counseling, (f) academic support services; (f) English as a Second Language; (g) Faculty Senate; and (h) Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs/Provost. In consultation with the designated liaison at each campus, we arranged additional interviews as appropriate. Supplemental respondents included: President or Chancellor; Faculty, Department Chairs, or Deans from departments serving large numbers of immigrants (e.g., Engineering); Student Affairs Vice President; Foreign Students' Coordinator; Director of Institutional Research; Director of Multicultural Center; and Directors of special programs serving large numbers of immigrant students (e.g., a program serving children of migrant farm workers). We also moderated focus groups with students on five campuses and held individual interviews with students on another three campuses.

We used semi-structured interview guides throughout the case studies, with slight variations in the guides for different functions or departments. Among the issues investigated were: (a) perceived trends in immigrant student enrollments and characteristics; (b) what students issues relevant to immigrants, if any, the institution was facing; (c) the degree to which campus leaders focused on immigrants in planning, policy development, program design, or student tracking or assessment; (d) perceived needs of immigrant students, and the differences between their needs and those of other students; (e) perceived responsiveness of the campus to immigrant student needs and interests; (f) the degree to which efforts to serve immigrants compete with efforts to serve other disadvantaged groups; and (g) the nature of the challenges and opportunities that increasing immigration may create for the institution.

We guaranteed confidentiality of both individual participants and institutions, inviting respondents to speak freely about the challenges and opportunities facing their institution related to increasing immigration.

Interviews were summarized in a narrative form using a standard format. These write-ups were then coded using a specially designed set of codes that responded to the major research questions. Inter-rater reliability of 65% or greater was maintained in coding. Finally, a computerized

qualitative data analysis is extracting the major themes across institutions and comparing states and institutional types.

SELECTED RESULTS

Our preliminary analyses reveal three key challenges that institutions face in their efforts to serve immigrant students. As the number of immigrant students seeking access to higher education increases, institutions are likely to experience difficulty or problems related to: (1) implementing policies governing admissions, fees, and financial aid for individuals who do not have permanent residency status; (2) obtaining and evaluating foreign transcripts; and (3) conducting outreach and recruitment activities that reach immigrants while continuing to serve native-born students, particularly those from historically under-represented groups.

Policies related to those without permanent residence status. State and federal regulations require institutions to differentiate between those who are permanent residents (including refugees and asylees) and those without permanent resident status. The latter group includes those who are undocumented, have applied for asylum but not yet received a hearing, are out of status, or have temporary visas. This distinction is meaningful in three areas related to access: eligibility for admissions to public institutions, eligibility for resident (in-state) fees and tuition at public institutions, and eligibility for federal and state financial aid.

States and institutions differ in their policies toward those without permanent residency status. The majority of the public institutions we visited consider such individuals to be eligible for admissions.

In some but not all states, individuals without permanent residency status are ineligible for resident (in-state) fees and tuition at all public institutions. In some states, the policies vary across institutions, so that non-permanent residents may be charged in-state fees at some colleges or universities and out-of-state fees at others. The eligibility criteria for in-state tuition and fees has been debated in the courts with mixed results, and the issue appears far from settled.

Individuals without permanent residency status are not eligible for federal financial aid. States vary in their willingness to provide financial aid to this population. Some public colleges and universities have institutional financial aid funds that enable them to provide financial support to non-permanent residents, but most do not.

Since many individuals without permanent residency status are low income, the combination of out-of-state fees and ineligibility for federal and state financial aid can constitute a major barrier to access for this population. The actual number of students affected by these policies is a matter of debate, however, since for any given service area we do not know the number of undocumented individuals who are academically eligible and interested in attending college. Respondents' estimates of the number of students who were unable to attend their institution due to policies related to visa status ranged from fewer than a half dozen to several hundred per year.

Our case studies indicated that implementation of policies for those without permanent residence status is erratic and unsystematic. One reason for this pattern is that many staff, faculty, and administrators (as well as students) are confused about institutional policies and practices. It was not uncommon for different respondents within the same institution to give different explanations of institutional policies. Further, respondents were often ignorant of or misinformed about the policies of other public institutions in their state, including those with which they had articulation agreements. And, although we did not interview many public school officials, anecdotal evidence suggests that high school counselors and teachers are equally confused.

Even when administrators and department heads are clear about institutional policies in this area, this information may not be adequately communicated to staff who provide direct services to students. Staff turnover in departments such as financial aid and registration and the dispersion of counseling across a wide range of units greatly increase the difficulty of keeping staff and faculty informed about institutional policies.

A second reason for erratic implementation is the diversity of attitudes toward these policies. Some respondents pointed out that most of those who

are undocumented, out of status, or waiting for an asylum hearing plan to remain permanently in the United States. A higher education would enable these individuals to become more productive members of the society. Denying them access to higher education, these respondents contended, is consigning them to a permanent underclass. Other respondents, however, pointed out that the capacity of the nation's higher education and financial aid systems are limited. These respondents were concerned that citizens may be disadvantaged if subsidies and financial assistance are spread more widely. Still other respondents felt that it is unfair and illogical to charge international students attending college on student visas high non-resident tuition while those who are undocumented can pay resident tuition. In fact, two East Coast schools we visited expressed concern that international students were purposefully letting their student visas lapse so they could pay reduced tuition.

Confusion about institutional policies coupled with diverse (and strongly held) attitudes toward these policies has led to great variation in institutional practices, particularly with regard to fees. Some of the institutions with official policies requiring non-permanent residents ω pay out-of-state fees do not enforce this policy. In some cases, this is a purposeful strategy and in other cases it appears to be largely accidental. Directors and staff in the enrollment management and financial aid areas also differ in the level of effort spent on validating the information students provide on applications for admission or financial aid.

Although the dynamics described here apply to most of the institutions we visited, there were exceptions. Respondents within one community college, for example, showed a high degree of agreement about institutional policies and appeared consistent in their practices. Also, the salience of issues related to non-permanent residents varies across states and schools. The issue is most salient in California and Florida, although California confronts this issue primarily in the context of undocumented individuals, while Florida confronts the issue primarily in the context of those who have applied for asylum and are waiting for a hearing. Community colleges typically are more concerned about access for this population than are four-

year institutions, although a number of comprehensive and research universities have grappled with this issue.

Confusion about institutional policies within many institutions enable staff to administer their responsibilities in the manner congruent with their personal values. They do not need to confront the possibility that their personal values conflict with institutional values, since the institutional values often remain poorly defined.

Greater clarity about institutional policies will have mixed effects on access for those who lack permanent residence status. Misunderstanding, ignorance, and unsystematic implementation of institutional policies related to permanent residency status can either exacerbate or reduce the barriers to access that an individual immigrant student may face. For example, some staff told us that undocumented individuals "could not attend" certain colleges. Although these individuals might well have difficulty meeting the costs of the colleges under discussion, they are eligible for admissions. It is at least possible that some students who aspire to college are deterred from trying to enroll due to misinformation. Thus, more accurate information might encourage some students who currently are not college-bound to reconsider and prepare for postsecondary education or training.

On the other hand, sympathetic staff and lax enforcement of some policies (particularly related to fees) have provided access for some people who, under tighter conditions, would be charged non-resident tuition and perhaps be unable to attend college. If greater institutional attention to this issue results in stricter enforcement, barriers to access will increase for many. Other outcomes are feasible, however (although the current political climate renders them increasingly unlikely). Some institutions have successfully pushed for modifications to state or systemwide fee policies so that undocumented individuals or those who have applied for asylum can attain eligibility for resident fees. Others have attempted to direct institutional financial aid funds to those who are ineligible for federal financial aid.

Obtaining and reviewing foreign transcripts. Most colleges and universities require students who have attended secondary or postsecondary

school outside the United States to submit an official transcript of their work. This transcript is used for decisionmaking related to admissions and course placement. Students and institutions both encounter difficulties in this process.

First, many institutions require students to provide official transcripts. Often these transcripts must come directly from the certifying institution to the college, without passing through the students' hands. This policy is intended to prevent people from falsifying documents in order to obtain access to college. Some institutions reported receiving dozens of forged transcripts in past years, and their concerns about falsification of documents are rooted in past experience.

Compliance with this policy is feasible for immigrants from some countries, difficult for those from many other countries, and impossible for some. Our respondents reported that they were often unable to obtain student transcripts from schools in countries that have experienced considerable political upheaval or war, including some Southeast Asian countries, the former Soviet Union, and Haiti.

Many immigrants do bring copies of their transcripts with them when they leave their home country. In cases where the school in the home country does not respond, most institutions will accept an official transcript presented by the student, and some will accept copies.

Students who cannot present a transcript can attend some community colleges (although they may not be able to accumulate college credits for some time), or they can sit for the GED exam. Since this exam is offered only in English, it is not a feasible alternative for many recent immigrants.

Once the transcript is obtained, the school then faces the challenge of interpreting it. Despite a host of resource materials available to assist schools in this process, it remains, in the words of one respondent, "partly science and partly art." The process of reviewing transcripts is time consuming and requires trained staff. Most colleges we visited conduct these reviews internally, although some contract with non-profit agencies for this purpose. Those schools conducting the reviews internally are usually heavily dependent on one or two trained staff members. Although most of these staff

try to stay up to date on the professional literature in this area and consult with off-campus colleagues for difficult cases, their supervisors are essentially unable to evaluate their work, and some administrators expressed concerns about quality control. The non-profit agencies, on the other hand, are praised for their systematic approach and breadth of knowledge but are viewed as expensive and unable in some cases to customize their reports to a particular institutional curriculum.

The review process is particularly arduous for transfer applicants. Institutions with open admissions usually do not begin to review foreign transcripts until the student has actually enrolled, because they do not want to devote staff time to this process until they are sure the student will attend the institution. In this case, the students have to gamble in their enrollment selections, based on their best guesses about what credits will transfer. In other cases, the review process takes several months, partly due to a growing backlog of transcripts, so that one or more semesters might go by before a student learns the outcome. Although this problem is not strictly speaking a barrier to access, it may have deterrent effects for some students and others may face an extended time to degree and unexpected expenses. In addition, the staff time needed to reach decisions about admissions and transfer credit increases substantially as institutions serve more immigrants.

Foreign transcript reviews are often a source of dissatisfaction. Most of the immigrant students participating in this research said that they did not received adequate credit for work completed outside the United States. Faculty, however, expressed concerns that some immigrant students were poorly prepared for college in the United States.

Reviewing foreign transcripts is a labor intensive activity for staff in admissions and placement offices. Exceptions and appeals are typically handled on a case-by-case basis. As the number of immigrant applicants increases, the process may become time consuming and unwieldy.

The process of obtaining and reviewing transcripts from schools outside the United States can lead to conflict between the institution's goal of maintaining an orderly, systematic, and thorough process against students' desire for quick feedback, continued progress toward their educational

objectives, and recognition of past work, even if that work does not fit the sequence or structure of the U.S. educational system. Problems arise when students cannot comply with institutional policies, face substantial delays in their educational progress due to the review process, or disagree with the institutions' conclusions.

A related issue is screening immigrant (and international) students for language skills. Some institutions -- generally comprehensive or research universities -- require recent immigrants (e.g., those who have had some secondary school in other countries) to score above a given cut-off on the TOEFL. Some institutions allow immigrants to choose whether to submit TOEFL scores, SAT-V scores or both. Some -- especially community colleges or others with open enrollment -- don't have any English language competency requirement for admissions but do typically require placement tests at entry and may require new students to enroll in ESL courses before beginning their academic programs. A small number of community colleges will refer students with very low English skills as measured by placement tests to adult schools.

This variation in institutional practice reflects differences in institutional values and mission and is not, in itself, negative. Of more concern is that faculty, administrators and students routinely reported that the tests were poor predictors of actual performance among those enrolling. Many staff and faculty reported that students who performed well on standardized tests of English language ability were not necessarily able to write at a college level, to understand spoken English, or to express themselves verbally in English. In contrast, students (and some student advocates) complained that they were inappropriately placed in ESL, and that other faculty and students exaggerated the difficulties of communication. At worst, students feel they are being denied the opportunity to try; and faculty feel that they are being asked to accept an educational challenge for which they are unprepared.

Many of the policies related to English language proficiency were developed with international students in mind and extended to immigrants as their numbers began to increase. This approach does not address the question of whether U.S. institutions have different obligations to

immigrants compared to international students. It also fails to recognize that in many institutions, international students have access to a range of support services -- often including intensive ESL programs -- that may be unavailable to immigrants.

Underneath these concerns lies a basic question of whether existing assessment tools used to screen immigrants for admissions and/or placement are sufficiently valid and reliable. In addition, however, this issue reflects fundamental questions about how to balance students' "right to fail" against institutional responsibilities to promote academic success among those admitted or enrolling in college.

Approaches to outreach and recruitment. Although immigrants constitute a growing proportion of many institutions' target markets or service areas, our case studies revealed relatively few outreach efforts that are targeted specifically toward immigrant groups. With few exceptions, those that do exist are of modest size and scope. One institution in California, for example, has hired a Cambodian staff member to conduct outreach activities in local high schools with large numbers of Cambodian students. Another institution sponsors a program for children of migrant farm workers, most of whom are immigrants. Others place advertisements in foreign language newspapers, radio, and television. For the most part, however, our respondents assumed that outreach efforts targeted toward urban high schools and inner city communities would reach immigrants as well as native-born students. In addition, immigrants that are members of historically under-represented ethnic groups may receive special outreach services. (For example, a community college in California works closely with a local high school to boost college attendance among Latino students in the community, many of whom are immigrants.)

Most outreach and admissions offices we visited strive for a diverse staff that reflects the larger community, but success in this endeavor is mixed. Although a few institutions distribute information about applications and admissions in foreign languages, most did not. More often, bilingual staff are called upon to provide informal translation services when students with limited English abilities request assistance. Respondents from more selective institutions typically reported that students who are unable to get

through the admissions process in English are clearly unprepared for college level studies at their institution; those from community colleges or institutions with open admissions, however, often said that individuals with limited English abilities are an important target market for their services.

Few respondents thought that stronger outreach efforts to immigrant communities are needed. This perception may be biased by our selection of a sample of institutions that already have large enrollments of immigrant students. Many respondents reported that strong informal networks within immigrant communities provide a robust pipeline of immigrant students. Respondents in one community college in Chicago, for example, told us that Russian immigrants knew about the institution before they left their home country; upon arriving in the United States, some come directly from the airport to the campus.

Although informal networks are effective in routing large numbers of immigrants to the campuses we visited, some respondents expressed concern about over-reliance on these networks. These respondents were concerned that students might be channeled toward specific institutions, or specific programs, even if other institutions or programs might be a better fit for them. Others were concerned that they had no way to determine the number of immigrants who lacked access to an informal network of college information. A small but vocal minority of respondents provided colorful anecdotes about the manner in which information on how to fraudulently obtain financial aid permeated all too readily through immigrant communities.

Perhaps the most challenging issue institutions face, however, is integrating efforts to serve immigrant communities with efforts to boost enrollments of historically under-represented groups, especially African Americans and Hispanics. We found that, on many campuses, increasing participation of immigrants raises new questions about the designation of specific groups as "disadvantaged," "under-represented," or having special needs.

Almost all colleges and universities nationwide have some programs or policies in place intended to redress the historical under-representation of

students from certain ethnic groups. As immigration increases, college and university leaders are facing increasing pressure to reconsider the criteria for participation in special programs for educationally disadvantaged or underrepresented groups.

Some of our respondents objected to the exclusion of Asians from some programs designed to promote college-going and academic success among students from historically underrepresented groups. They also objected to the exclusion of Asians from scholarships or other sources of financial aid (usually institutional) also targeted to students from historically underrepresented groups. These respondents reminded us that the stereotype of Asians as a model minority masks the fact that some Asian immigrant groups (e.g., Cambodian, Hmong) have low rates of college-going.

On the other hand, some respondents pointed out that public institutions that admit a limited number of students whose grades and SAT scores are below required cut-off scores are increasingly admitting Asian immigrants with strong educational backgrounds but weak English skills instead of native-born African Americans, Chicanos or Latinos who were formerly admitted under these programs. Further, in some schools, Asians constitute a substantial proportion of participants in educational equity programs that serve low-income students. Some respondents noted that many Asian immigrants, although low income, come from highly educated families and are therefore less disadvantaged than low income individuals who came from families without a history of postsecondary achievement.

Tensions were also evident at some campuses between immigrants and non-immigrants within the same ethnic group. Respondents in most of the East Coast schools we visited observed that immigrants from Caribbean nations are generally better prepared for college than are native-born African Americans. Others pointed out that some Hispanic immigrants (e.g., many middle class Cubans and those from South American nations) are better prepared for college than native born Hispanics (e.g., Chicanos). Some respondents feared that colleges would strive to improve black or Hispanic enrollment and retention rates by focusing on immigrants who are already well prepared to succeed in college, not by focusing on native-born

individuals who may have attended weak secondary schools and therefore need special assistance.

These tensions were not apparent across the board. Some respondents denied that intergroup competition existed at their institutions; others thought that such conflicts were not occurring at the present but were likely in the future. Thus, these intergroup tensions are best viewed as a potential but not inevitable risk of increasing participation of immigrants in postsecondary education.

Respondents also pointed out that the immigrant groups themselves differed substantially in preparation for college. Within virtually every ethnic group, some immigrants have strong educational backgrounds and are likely to attend and graduate from college without special assistance; others are barely literate in their native language and therefore need considerable assistance to gain access to U.S. postsecondary education.

These observations challenge the assumptions behind the designation of certain groups as "disadvantaged" or "under-represented". The category "black," for example, on many campuses now includes the traditionally underrepresented group of African Americans, a group of Haitian immigrants who vary widely in their preparation for college, and a group of immigrants from other Caribbean nations who are highly prepared for college. Under these circumstances, the logic of classifying all black students as disadvantaged may begin to break down, especially if immigrants with strong educational backgrounds displace native-born students of the same ethnicity with relatively weak educational backgrounds.

The solution, for some respondents, lies in expanding the categories used to track applications, admissions, enrollment, and retention. One California university, for example, now has over a dozen categories for Asian students and six for Hispanic students. This approach has some important advantages. It reduces ambiguity in the data, enables institutions to select subgroups for special programs and/or focused outreach, and responds to concerns that immigrants may be displacing native-born individuals.

On the other hand, this approach is awkward at best. There are literally scores of cultures and ethnicities represented on our college

campuses. At some point, the ability of a college to make sense of multiple categories of data and respond appropriately to the needs of each group breaks down.

DISCUSSION

Our interviews with staff and faculty at twenty institutions revealed three ways in which increasing immigration challenges institutional practice. First, institutions experienced concerns about and some problems in implementing policies governing admissions, fees, and financial aid for those without permanent residency status. Second, the process of obtaining and evaluating foreign transcripts is difficult and time consuming; screening for English language competency raises additional challenges. Third, traditional approaches to outreach and recruitment, especially in the area of affirmative action, are challenged by increasing the diversity in the population that immigration creates.

Given the range of public opinion about our nation's immigration policies, institutional efforts to clarify its responsibilities to immigrants and/or promote a more systematic implementation of policy are likely to lead to tension and conflict. As a result, some institutions we visited seemed reconciled to accepting the status quo.

The current situation, however, carries its own risks. One problem is a lack of efficiency in administrative functions related to access. Ambiguity and confusion generally add to workloads. and case appeals and reviews may become increasingly time-consuming.

Equity is a concern as well. The current practices risk inadvertently perpetuating educational inequities at the individual level, since one student may gain access while another, in the same situation, may be denied access. Institutional policies and practices related to immigrants inevitably involve trade-off among students, since resources are limited. Rather than make these trade-offs based on a thoughtful analysis of the institutional role and capacity, many institutions are instead avoiding this work and, by default, allowing individual staff or faculty to determine appropriate action.

Increasing immigration also raises new questions about the meaning of "disadvantaged" or "under-represented" and the logic of grouping students by broad ethnic categories. By increasing the number of categories into which students are grouped, institutions can more closely target and track specific cultural or ethnic groups (both foreign-born and native-born), but at some point will lose the ability to respond effectively to multiple groups.

These are some of the lessons derived from the experiences of campuses that are already serving large number of immigrants. Given increasing immigration to our country, many other colleges can expect growth in the number of immigrants in their service areas. As they strive to serve these students, they are likely to confront the issues described here. And when administrators and academic leaders face these issues, they are likely to call on institutional researchers for assistance. Among the questions that institutional research can address are:

- Does enrollment of immigrants in our institution reflect the growth in immigration to our service area?
- What evidence exists, if any, that immigrants are displacing native-born students, especially those from historically underrepresented ethnic groups, in admissions, financial aid recipients, and support services aimed at nontraditional, new, minority or disadvantaged populations?
- Are immigrant students succeeding academically?
- Should we raise or lower our TOEFL cut-off for admissions? Should we increase the number of ESL courses we are offering? How many immigrant students are denied admission due to inadequate English proficiency; how many are accepted with questionable English proficiency?
- Should we break-out immigrants as a subgroup of our students for special study and/or focused interventions? How if at all do immigrant students differ from native-born students of the same ethnicity?

Proactive efforts to address these and other questions are likely to increase efficiency, equity, and the ability to serve a highly diverse campus community.

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